

SUPREME COURT OF WYOMING

Ahrenholtz v. Laramie Economic Development Corp.

79 P.3d 511 (Wyo. 2003), 2003 WY 149 · No. No. 02-165 · Decided December 24, 2003

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Wyoming reviewed summary judgment in a tortious-interference action arising from a proposed expansion of Wyoming Technical Institute. The court held that circumstantial evidence and conflicting reasonable inferences created a genuine issue of material fact regarding intentional interference with a prospective contractual relation, reversed summary judgment on that claim, and remanded for trial. It affirmed dismissal of the intentional-infliction-of-emotional-distress claim and the dismissal of Pam Ahrenholtz as a party.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Wyoming
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Hill, Chief Justice; Hill, C.J.; Golden, J.; Lehman, J.; Kite, J.; Voigt, J.
JURISDICTION	Wyoming
DECIDED	December 24, 2003
DOCKET	No. 02-165
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs appealed a Wyoming district court order granting summary judgment to defendants on a claim for intentional interference with a prospective contractual relation or business expectancy and on a claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress. The district court certified the summary-judgment ruling as a final order under W.R.C.P. 54(b).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is reviewed de novo under the same standards applied by the district court. The record is viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, with all favorable inferences drawn from affidavits, depositions, exhibits, and other proper materials. Summary judgment is improper when material facts support contradictory inferences or reasonable minds could differ regarding their significance.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Wyoming Supreme Court opinion; precedential

PARTIES

John D. Ahrenholtz, Pam D. Ahrenholtz, Ahrenholtz Masonry, Inc.,
Point North LLC v. Laramie Economic Development Corporation,
Robert J. "Joel" Coffey, Robert Boysen

TOPICS

intentional interference with expectancy

summary judgment

appellate procedure

standard of review

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

torts

civil procedure

appellate procedure

remedies

commercial litigation

construction law

real estate

municipal law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the evidence created genuine issues of material fact concerning intentional and improper interference with the plaintiffs' prospective contractual relation or business expectancy with WTI.
2. Whether the plaintiffs presented sufficient evidence of emotional distress to avoid summary judgment on the intentional-infliction-of-emotional-distress claim and to support Pam Ahrenholtz's status as a plaintiff.
3. Whether summary judgment was proper when the evidence and reasonable inferences were subject to conflicting interpretations.

HOLDINGS

1. Summary judgment was improper because the circumstantial evidence and competing reasonable inferences created genuine issues of material fact regarding whether defendants intentionally and improperly interfered with the plaintiffs' prospective contractual relation or business expectancy with WTI.
2. Summary judgment was proper because the plaintiffs presented no evidence supporting emotional damages beyond the basic allegation that Pam Ahrenholtz was emotionally damaged; the district court's dismissal of Pam and the emotional-distress claim was affirmed.
3. A court may not resolve competing reasonable inferences, credibility questions, or evaluative judgments between rationally possible conclusions on summary judgment.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Summary judgment should not be granted where contradictory inferences may be drawn from undisputed evidentiary facts." (517)

"Evaluative judgment between two rationally possible conclusions from facts cannot be engaged in on summary judgment." (517)

“If the evidence is subject to conflicting interpretations or reasonable minds might differ as to its significance, summary judgment is improper.” (517)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

WTI planned a substantial expansion of its automotive and diesel technology campus in Laramie. Ahrenholtz developed the Vision 2000 proposal, investigated land and financing, and incurred project-related expenses, but WTI never signed a binding agreement or letter of intent with him. LEDC acquired and later sold an annexed West Laramie property to WTI, which ultimately contracted with another builder; Boysen moved from LEDC to WTI during the project and Coffey performed surveying and construction-related work on the alternative site. Plaintiffs claimed defendants used information about their proposal and their positions with LEDC and WTI to cause WTI to reject their proposal.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The plaintiffs sued LEDC, Coffey, and Boysen asserting intentional interference with a business expectancy, professional misconduct, conversion, fraud, conspiracy, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The district court converted defendants' motion to dismiss into a motion for summary judgment, allowed discovery, dismissed or resolved most claims, dismissed Pam Ahrenholtz as a party, and granted summary judgment on the interference and emotional-distress claims while retaining a professional-misconduct claim against Coffey. The Wyoming Supreme Court affirmed in part, reversed the summary judgment on the interference claim, and remanded that claim for trial.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand for a trial on the merits of the plaintiffs' claim for tortious interference with a contract or business expectancy.

CASES CITED

- Reno Livestock Corp. v. Sun Oil Co. (Delaware), 638 P.2d 147, 150-51 (Wyo. 1981)
- Hoblyn v. Johnson, 2002 WY 152, ¶ 11, 55 P.3d 1219, ¶ 11 (Wyo. 2002)
- McLean v. Hyland Enterprises, Inc., 2001 WY 111, ¶ 14, 34 P.3d 1262, ¶ 14 (Wyo. 2001)
- Birt v. Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Inc., 2003 WY 102, ¶ 71, 75 P.3d 640, ¶ 71 (Wyo. 2003)
- John Q. Hammons Inc. v. Poletis, 954 P.2d 1353, 1357-58 (Wyo. 1998)
- Cordova v. Gosar, 719 P.2d 625, 639 (Wyo. 1986)
- Weaver v. Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Wyoming, 609 P.2d 984, 986-87 (Wyo. 1980)
- Wilder v. Cody Country Chamber of Commerce, 933 P.2d 1098, 1105 (Wyo. 1997)
- O'Donnell v. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming, 2003 WY 112, ¶ 8, n. 1, 76 P.3d 308, ¶ 8, n. 1 (Wyo. 2003)

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/state/wyoming-supreme-court-of-wyoming/2003/ahrenholtz-v-laramie-economic-development-corp-2bs1o1f6>